

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

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SUBJ: AMBASSADOR VISITS ANTIGUA

SUMMARY

DURING AMBASSADOR'S INITIAL VISIT TO ANTIGUA MARCH 11-12, PREMIER WALTER EMPHASIZED GOA'S INTENTION TO SEEK INDEPENDENCE AFTER SECURING AN ELECTORAL MANDATE DURING 1975 WITH INDEPENDENCE LIKELY IN LATE 1976. WALTER EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION OVER LACK OF DEVELOPMENT FUNDS AND CHIDED US AND OTHERS FOR NOT BEING RESPONSIVE TO LDC NEEDS. WALTER ADVISED THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR US TO DEAL WITH CARIBBEAN LDC'S ON FRIENDLY, BI-LATERAL BASIS NOW RATHER THAN LATER WHEN SUCH ACTION MIGHT BE MORE DIFFICULT. END SUMMARY.

1. AMB BRITTON MADE FORMAL VISIT TO ANTIGUA MARCH 11-12 WITH BRIEF RETURN STOPOVER MARCH 14. AMB PRESENTED LETTER OF CREDENCE TO PREMIER GEORGE WALTER ON MARCH 12 AND CONFERRED WITH HIM AND OTHER RANKING GOA OFFICIALS. HE ALSO TOURED AND MET WITH PRINCIPAL OFFICERS OF US NAVAL FACILITY, US AIR STATION AND US-OWNED WEST INDIES OIL REFINERY.

2. DURING COMMENTS AT PRIVATE MEETING AND LATER AT LUNCHEON HE HOSTED, WALTER EXPLANIED THAT ANTIGUA INTENDED TO SEEK INDEPENDENCE AFTER SECURING AN ELECTORAL MANDATE FOR THIS ACTION PROBABLY SOMETIME DURING 1975, WITH INDEPENDENCE
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LIKELY SOMETIME IN LATE 1976. HE EXPRESSED VIEW THAT ANTIGUA'S

STATUS AS AN "ASSOCIATED STATE" TENDED TO BE AMBIGUOUS AND MISLEADING TO SOME, ESPECIALLY U.S., WHICH SEEMED TO HOLD VIEW THAT ANTIGUA WAS STILL PRIMARILY A RESPONSIBILITY OF UK. SPECIFICALLY, WALTER SAID, DEVELOPED COUNTRIES TENDED TO GIVE LITTLE HEED TO NEEDS OF ANTIGUA AND OTHER LDC ISLANDS. WALTER OPINED THAT ANTIGUA AND MANY OTHER MINI-STATES WOULD BE INDEPENDENT IN FEW YEARS AND WOULD MAKE VOICES HEARD IN UN AND OTHER FORUMS. HE POINTED OUT THAT, WHILE INCLINATIONS OF ANTIGUA ARE TO DEAL WITH LARGE FRIENDLY POWERS RATHER THAN WITH STATES LIKE CUBA, WHICH HAD SYSTEM NOT COMPATIBLE WITH ANTIGUA'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, ANTIGUA IS WORRIED BY UNRESPONSIVE ATTITUDE OF ITS LARGER NEIGHBORS. WALTER EXPRESSED VIEW THAT, ALTHOUGH LDC'S WERE NOT SIGNIFICANT IN TERMS OF RESOURCES, THEY LAY RIGHT AT US DOORSTEP, MUCH CLOSER THAN FOR INSTANCE, SOUTHEAST ASIA. LDC ISLANDS, HE ADDED, DID HAVE LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE FOR THEIR SIZE, AND ATTITUDES OF SUCH PEOPLE SHOULD BE IMPORTANT TO US PEOPLE. HE SAID IT WOULD BE BETTER IN HIS MIND TO DEAL WITH SMALLER CARIBBEAN STATES ON FRIENDLY BASIS NOW RATHER THAN LATER ON WHEN ATTITUDES MIGHT BE LESS POSITIVE. WALTER CONCLUDED THAT HE WAS GLAD USG HAD SENT SOMEONE WHO APPEARED TO UNDERSTAND FEELINGS OF CARIBBEAN PEOPLE AND ASKED AMB TO TRANSMIT THESE FEELING TO WASHINGTON.

3. AMB THANKED PREMIER FOR HIS FORCEFUL AND DIRECT COMMENTS AND PROMISED TO TRANSMIT WALTER'S REMARKS TO WASHINGTON.

4. IN PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS, WALTER STRESSED THAT GOA WAS FRUSTRATED BY ITS INABILITY TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT FUNDS FOR DEVELOPMENT. WALTER CLAIMED THAT GOA HAD BEEN PAYING WAY PRIOR TO OCTOBER 1974 EARTHQUAKE WHICH CAUSED SOME US \$50 MILLION IN DAMAGES, ESPECIALLY TO HISTORIC AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND THAT GOA WAS NOW HARD PUT TO MAKE ENDS MEET. WALTER COMPLAINED THAT ALTHOUGH UK DID GIVE EARTHQUAKE AID, IT SUBTRACTED SUCH ASSISTANCE FROM PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED CAPITAL AID PROJECTS. ONLY REAL EARTHQUAKE AID TO GOA THUS FAR, HE CLAIMED, WAS GOTT GRANT OF \$25,000 AND SOFT LOAN OF \$125,000.

5. COMMENT: CLEARLY WALTER IS HOPING USG WILL COME THROUGH WITH SOME FORM OF BILATERAL ASSISTANCE, DESPITE MY REITERATING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO HIM OUR POLICIES OF EXTENDING AID ON REGIONAL BASIS IN THIS AREA. HE DID NOT BRING UP QUESTION OF COMPENSATION FOR US BASE FACILITIES AT ANY TIME DURING MY VISIT AND MADE NO MENTION OF ANY PARTICULAR PROBLEMS STEMMING FROM OUR BASES. IT WOULD SEEM LOGICAL, HOWEVER, WITH INDEPENDENCE APPROACHING, FOR GOA TO EXAMINE MORE CLOSELY QUESTION OF POSSIBLE QUID PRO QUO FOR US BASES.

6. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT ANTIGUA DESPERATELY NEEDS FUNDS
BUT WALTER OBVIOUSLY FAILED TO RECOGNIZE THAT GOA WAS IN
PERILOUS FINANCIAL CONDITION LONG BEFORE EARTHQUAKE, IN
LARGE PART BECAUSE OF UNWISE GOA BUDGETARY POLICIES. WALTER'S
CLAIM OF EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE IS APPARENTLY EXAGGERATED -- CDB
TEAM, FOR INSTANCE, ESTIMATES DAMAGE AT ABOUT \$5 MILLION.
THERE IS, IN FACT, SOME INDICATION THAT INSURANCE CLAIMS
STEMMING FROM QUAKE HAVE GIVEN SHOT IN ARM TO AILING ECONOMY,
AT LEAST FOR SHORT TERM. END COMMENT.
BRITTON

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